



Supporting Families of Children with Autism

Addressing Caregiver Stress

Parent/ caregiver guide

Caring for young children with developmental and behavioral needs is a meaningful journey filled with learning and growth. This journey often includes learning new information, attending appointments, completing paperwork, and navigating the diagnostic process. While rewarding, these responsibilities can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially while balancing the needs of siblings, household tasks, and your own well-being. Finding the right support for yourself is incredibly important. Use this worksheet as a guide for keeping your support network active.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO EXPAND YOUR SUPPORT AND FOSTER COMMUNITY

Research shows caregiver stress affects not only parent well-being, but also the way families experience their child's autism symptoms. By **recognizing stress early** and planning for support, caregivers can strengthen family well-being and enhance their child's progress.

No caregiver should feel like they have to do everything alone. **Building a support system** is one of the most powerful steps for your well-being and your child's growth.

When caregivers feel supported—through people who listen, services that provide breaks, or practices that strengthen emotional, physical, and social health—children with autism and their families have better outcomes. **Taking care of yourself** is not selfish; it strengthens your ability to care for your child.

Support will look different for every family, so it's important to **identify what works best for you**. For some, it may be leaning on a partner or extended family. For others, it may be connecting with reliable schools, therapists, respite care, or support groups. What matters most is creating a network and a map of your community to help you maintain a balanced life for you and your family.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT MAY INCLUDE:

- A partner or co-caregiver who shares caregiving responsibilities
- Extended family or trusted friends who can provide help or a listening ear
- Reliable schools, therapists, or providers who understand your child's needs
- Respite services, personal care assistants (PCA), or after-school programs
- Parent support groups or community organizations where you can connect with others.

Reflection Prompts:

Who is in my support network now? Who else could I reach out to for help?

CARING FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH

Taking care of your emotional and social well-being is just as important as getting enough sleep, eating well, or exercising. Many caregivers focus all of their time on their child's needs, but having time for yourself and with other adults helps you recharge and prevents burnout.

Take a moment to reflect about what recharges you and prevents burnout:

- What activities do I do that are just for me?
- What helps me feel supported in my daily life?
- What kinds of support (people, services, activities) make a difference for me?

Protective factors that improve my well-being

Practices and habits that help caregivers reduce stress and build resilience.

- Getting enough sleep
- Maintaining healthy nutrition
- Taking breaks throughout the day
- Practicing mindfulness or relaxation techniques
- Engaging in faith or spiritual activities
- Connecting with adults through meaningful support and socialization
- Spending time on hobbies and activities you enjoy

Reflection Prompts:

One support I want to lean on more often is ...

One new support I would like to try is ...



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